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ABSTRACT

Educational restructuring, an emerging concept without a single definition or a definitive model, supports the notion of multiple alternatives. Typical school improvement and excellence initiatives do not, by themselves, constitute restructuring. Restructuring means that schools should be organized according to children's learning needs. To achieve real educational excellence for all students is likely to require significant alterations in our educational system at local, district, and state levels. Since restructuring means preserving and building upon successful educational practices and rethinking and redesigning what has failed, we must ultimately reexamine all aspects of schooling, including mission and goals, organization and management, curriculum, instruction, educator roles and responsibilities, parent and community involvement, school finance, and educational regulation and control. Several ongoing restructuring efforts provide concrete examples--the Coalition of Essential Schools, the National Network for Educational Renewal, the NEA Mastery in Learning Project Schools, the Holmes Group, and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the economy. Critical restructuring components include focusing at the building level, educating all students, clarifying and raising expectations, personalizing teaching and learning, rethinking and altering educator roles, applying research and development knowledge, humanizing the organizational climate, and involving parents and the community. (MLH)

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WHAT RESTRUCTURING IS: IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION

Glen Harvey and David P. Crandall
1988

What does it mean to restructure schools? What would it look like to restructure the entire educational enterprise? What distinguishes Theodore Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, for example, from the recommendations of the Commission on Excellence in Education in A Nation At Risk?

These are not easy questions, and there are no simple answers. Restructuring is an emerging concept without a single definition or a definitive model. There are, in fact, many conceptions of a restructured school; the concept itself suggests and supports the notion of multiple alternatives.

There is some agreement, however, both on what counts as restructuring and what does not count. As David H. Lynn, editor of Basic Education notes, "schools must truly be re-formed, not simply greased to do the same old thing with less friction" (1987).

Restructuring is not adding more of the same, tinkering around the edges, even making significant improvements to the current structure. Typical school improvement initiatives, however important, and efforts to apply the school effectiveness research to schools in search of excellence do not, by themselves, constitute restructuring -- which is not to say that they are not well intentioned efforts likely to improve the quality of education our children receive.

Lynn goes on to state what he considers restructuring to be.

> *First and foremost it means that schools should be organized according to the needs of children and the ways in which they actually learn, not on rigid models half-military and half-industrial. Educators and policymakers must begin to concentrate less on so-called "inputs" -- the size of classes, teachers salaries, and graduation requirements, valid as each may be on its own -- and look more to "outcomes" -- what children, all children, can be expected to know and be able to do at various stages of their education (1987).*

This is but one definition; obviously there are others. Underlying any definition of and/or approach to restructuring schools, however, is the shared belief that the current system must be rethought and redesigned in order to be more effective in meeting the demands of our changing society and in achieving commonly held goals. As Duttweiler and Hord (1987) point out,

> *in order to guide educational reform, policy makers must visualize and articulate the outcomes their system should strive to achieve, then see that those systems are designed to enable people to choose actions that have the best chance of accomplishing the goals and achieving the outcomes.*

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To achieve real excellence in education for all students is likely to require significant alterations in what we currently recognize as our educational system -- at the local, district, and state levels. According to Cohen (1987), the necessary changes "will affect virtually every aspect of the structure and operations of the education system, from the schoolhouse to the state house." Efforts to restructure begin with the premise that the current boundaries and visions of education and schooling are malleable; rather than limiting images of what could be, they provide a jumping off point for considering alternative means of achieving educational excellence.

To restructure means to preserve and build upon what has been successful in educating our children and to rethink and redesign those aspects of the enterprise that have failed. This ultimately requires taking a critical look at all aspects of schooling including:

- mission and goals of education and schooling;
- organization and management at the local, district, state, and federal levels;
- curriculum and structure of knowledge;
- instruction;
- the roles and responsibilities of educational personnel;
- the roles, responsibilities, and involvement of parents and the community;
- school finance; and
- educational regulation and control.

The sheer magnitude of this list of categories to reconsider and perhaps redesign gives a general sense of the meaning of restructuring, as well as some understanding of the level of effort and length of time required to take on a restructuring endeavor. Unfortunately, the prospect of rethinking the educational enterprise in its entirety is more likely to be experienced as overwhelming than enticing and stimulating, particularly when it is presented in abstract concepts and categories rather than concrete portraits of alternatives.

Fortunately, there are several ongoing restructuring efforts that provide these concrete examples. Among them are:

- The Coalition of Essential Schools;
- The National Network for Educational Renewal;
- NEA Mastery in Learning Project Schools;
- The Holmes Group; and
- The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession.

It is important to note that these initiatives and their respective sets of recommendations are suggested only as examples. To restructure means to first identify the mission and goals that are desired and then to design a system that will allow the successful achievement of the goals and enactment of the mission. To simply adopt one of the alternatives listed above may result in traveling down a path to an unwanted destination.

Critical Components of Restructuring

If one were to examine the institutions involved in the five projects listed above, it would become quite clear that there is no one right way to structure (or restructure) schools. Each school must be designed to achieve its individual mission within the community in which it finds itself. As Fullan (1982) aptly reminds, change is bound by its context. "The history, personalities, and socio-political climate within each setting constitutes major determinants of change outcomes." As a result, restructured schools may look quite different from one another, as each reflects its own community realities, needs, beliefs, and values.

Nevertheless, looking across the various efforts to restructure schools, significant similarities begin to emerge. Taken together, the following core components of restructuring can be identified as critical, the majority of which are overlapping and interactive with one another.

- **Focus at the Building Level**. If significant changes in the educational system are to occur, restructuring efforts must be focused on and driven by the local level. Obviously changes of the magnitude of those discussed above cannot be achieved without involvement at the district and state (if not federal) levels -- but the message is clear and consistent: if restructuring is to be successful, it must be building-based. In the view of the Committee for Economic Development, for example, "reform is most needed where learning takes place in the individual schools, in the classroom, and in the interaction between teacher and student" (1985). On a similar note, Timar and Kirp (1987) point out the limitations of a top-down approach.

  > *A school must set a tone that will be apparent to the students. That tone, an organizational ethos, determines the character of the school. It sets the expectation for excellence or failure. But it is created by individuals working in schools, not by bureaucratic mandates that emanate from distant places.*

- **Educate ALL Students.** Underlying approaches to restructuring is the belief that all students are important and that all can and must learn. It is noteworthy that discussions of restructuring spend considerable time discussing the ways in which schools must be redesigned in order to better meet the needs of students who traditionally have been failed by the current structure.

- **Clarify and Raise Expectations**. Just as restructuring efforts maintain that all students must receive a quality education, they expect that all students will achieve mastery of widely agreed upon skills and curricular areas. Similar to the

effective schools research, an emphasis is placed on clarifying and sharing high expectations for student performance and behavior. The emphasis on expectations is not limited to students, however. Teachers, administrators, parents, and other members of the community are also expected to meet certain standards and responsibilities and play particular roles. The mission and goals of the school must also be clear -- and they must be shared and endorsed by students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community alike.

- **Personalize Teaching and Learning**. The concept of "personalizing" teaching and learning can hold many different meanings for different people. However, common to restructuring efforts is the notion of a child-centered approach to instruction. Coaching, tailoring, and individualizing are all frequently referred to. More traditional approaches to both curriculum and instruction are rethought and generally redesigned in restructuring efforts.

- **Rethink and Alter the Roles and Responsibilities of Educational Personnel**. Many of the recent restructuring efforts have focused on reexamining the roles and responsibilities of teachers and professionalizing the field of teaching, as evidenced by the work of The Holmes Group and the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession as well as by local efforts such as one in Rochester, New York. Although there are a variety of aspects to consider within this component, one of the most prominent among restructuring efforts is the notion of shared decision making and shared leadership. As the President of the Rochester Teachers Association pointed out, "If accountability means assuming responsibility for the decisions and choices that one makes, then teachers, to be held accountable, must not be locked out of the decisionmaking process" (Urbanski, 1987). Similarly, in his report (1987) on educational leadership, Governor Bill Clinton draws on the observations and insights of Rosabeth Moss Kanter:

  > *The model of the single leader may be declining in favor of a coalition of leaders . . . who act together and divide various leadership functions among themselves. In fact, it may also be important to ensure that a much larger number of members of the organization are capable of taking on pieces of the leadership role. What will be important is that the functions are served -- not that any single person has total responsibility for performing them.*

- **Apply Research and Development Knowledge**. If restructuring efforts are to be successful and are to avoid costly trial-and-error experiments and often counter-productive duplication of effort, it is critical that faculties turn to available research and development (R&D) for insight and guidance as they embark on their restructuring efforts. It is equally important that they continue to draw upon R&D as their restructuring initiative progresses.

- **Humanize the Organizational Climate**. The overlap of this component with many of those cited above is obvious. The notion here is that the school, as well as the classroom, must be a pleasant environment conducive to learning and working. Again, the emphasis is on looking across all members of the

educational community to ensure that the school provides a place that nurtures and supports them in their collective efforts to grow.

- **Involve Parents and the Community**. Consistent across restructuring efforts is the emphasis on increasing the active (as opposed to superficial) involvement of parents in the education of their children. As evidenced by the examples above, additional emphasis has also been placed on moving beyond parents to raise the level of involvement and commitment of other community members as well. Partnerships -- with area businesses and local colleges and universities -- are playing an increasingly important role in efforts to redesign the country's schools. Community support and commitment are important factors to success.

It is critical that each of these eight components be examined and addressed in any restructuring effort. While it is not necessary to respond to and reflect every component in the short-term and on the same timeline, we would argue that to constitute a "restructured school" ultimately requires incorporating each of the components into the overall design. And that design must grow out of each community's shared vision of how it can reach the ultimate goal of schooling -- well-prepared youth.

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